

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF
THREE UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE
LORD'S SUPPER

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Preface:

The sacrament, rite, or ordinance of the Lord's Supper has served as a mark of the unity of the Christian Church. Unfortunately, it has also marked the division that has splintered the church.

The U. S. Army Chaplain is charged with the task of ministering to all personnel within the army. That charge has given each chaplain the responsibility to minister to Christians with a variety of theological backgrounds.

The purpose of this paper is to shed some historical light on the three major understandings of the Lord's Supper within Christendom. That historical perspective can best be accomplished by a comparison of three views of the Lord's Supper expounded during the third decade of the 16th century.

It hardly needs to be said that the church does not continue to live in the 16th century. What is demonstrated in the following pages may not adequately represent any one of the three traditions today. An evolution of theological understanding has brought to birth better understandings between Christians of the various theological traditions. However, the differences that separated Christians in the 16th century have not been completely overcome. The three positions outlined below still fairly well represent the three major historical positions of Christendom vis-a-vis the Lord's Supper.

If the paper appears to be polemical the author pleads guilty on two grounds. He is a Lutheran pastor personally committed to Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper. Also, the controversies of the 1520's find their focus in Martin Luther against the Roman Catholics and the "Reformed"

Introduction:

Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper was formed almost exclusively by his hermeneutical principle of Sola Scriptura and his Christological principle. R. H. Fischer, in the Introduction to Volume 37 of Luther's Works, The American Edition, says, "Luther's doctrine of the sacrament is derived from his doctrine of the Word of God, and his doctrine of the written Word is derived from his understanding of Christ, the Incarnate Word."¹ In his controversy with Zwingli in 1529 it was the words of Christ, "Hoc est Corpus meum", written on the table and covered with a cloth that guarded Luther from making any rational concessions. For Luther the words were plain and could mean only one thing, viz., the body and blood of Christ were present in, with, and under the bread and wine.

Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper reached its climax in 1529 when he met Ulrich Zwingli in a colloquy at Marburg in the German province of Hesse. But by this time Luther had been embroiled in the controversy over the nature of the Lord's Supper for a decade. That decade can be divided into two rather distinct periods, during which Luther directed his rhetoric against two separate opponents. From 1519 to about 1525 he was on the offensive against the Roman Catholic understanding of the Sacrament. From the spring of 1526 he was on the defensive against those who held a purely symbolical understanding of the Lord's Supper. The two periods are not totally exclusive. Luther was aware of the potential threat of those whom he called "Schwaermer" as early as 1522 and had written, "Against the Heavenly Prophets" in January 1525. There he had expressed

strong opposition to Karlstadt's understanding of the Eucharist. Nor did he cease speaking against the Roman Catholic abuses of the sacrament in 1525. Yet the three sermons which he preached at Eastertide 1526, and which were edited and published in the fall of that year under the title, The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ--Against the Fanatics, serves as a good dividing point.

There is no need to create a third period in Luther's controversies on the Lord's Supper, though such an alternative is possible. Zwingli was a more astute theologian than some other men whom Luther had referred to as "Schwaermer." In a footnote to Luther's treatise That These Word's of Christ, "This is My Body," etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics, R. H. Fischer says, "Having directed a further broadside at Karlstadt and the fanatics in 1525, he now also described Zwingli as a 'Schwaermer.'"² As far as Luther was concerned there were only two opponents to contend with. The papists on Luther's right had violated the Gospel by inverting the direction of the sacrament when they make God the recipient of the Sacrifice of the Mass offered by the priest, and the "Schwaermer" on Luther's left who violate the Gospel by eliminating Christ from the sacrament.

We turn now to the particular teachings of the Lord's Supper against which Luther directed his writings. In treating the earlier period of Luther's attack on the Roman Catholic understanding of the Lord's Supper we will examine communion under one species, transsubstantiation, the sacrifice of the mass and opus operatum. Then we will turn to the second period in which Luther directs his attack against

the "Schwaermer", and especially Zwingli and Oecolampadius whom Luther regarded as the most formidable of these rivals.

I. Against the Roman Catholic Doctrine of the Lord's Dupper

A. Communion Under One Species

In the early years of the Reformation when Luther was directing his attacks against the papacy, he was quite lenient toward communion under one species. He accepted the teaching of concomitance which taught that the whole body and blood of Christ was present in either or both the bread and the wine. Withholding the cup from the laity was only a visible sign of the corruption the had taken place in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

When Luther wrote The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods in 1519 he conceded that withholding the cup from the laity is not right, but on the other hand he does not believe that this invalidates the sacrament. "Of course at present both kinds are not given to the people daily, as in former times. But this is not necessary since the priesthood partakes of it daily in the sight of the people. It is enough that the people desire it daily and at present receive one kind, as the Christian Church ordains and provides."³

Although Luther is lenient, it is his wish that a general council restore the cup to the laity so that the form of the sacrament would be given in its entirety. "For my part, however, I would consider it a good thing if the church should again decree in a general council that all persons be given both kinds, like the priests. Not because one kind is insufficient, since indeed the desire of faith

is alone sufficient.... But it would be fitting and fine that the form, or sign, of the sacrament be given not in part only, but in its entirety..."⁴

The followers of John Huss in Bohemia had demanded the cup in the Lord's Supper. Luther was often identified with this group that had been condemned as heretical. Luther did not want that identification though it became less objectionable to him as the decade of the 1520's progressed. In 1520 Luther says that the Bohemians were wrong in demanding the cup and the Roman Church was wrong in withholding the cup from them. At this point Luther still identified himself with the Roman Church. In chiding both the Bohemian followers of Huss and the Roman Church he wrote, "Sie thun nit recht, das sie meynen, es musse also sein, and WIR auch nit recht, das wir wollen, es sey ketzerisch, doch ists auff keiner seysen ketzerey."⁵

In 1520 when Luther wrote An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian State, he still felt the same toward the Bohemians. "So then, although it is the IMPATIENCE of the Bohemians which is at fault, yet the pope and his followers are still more to blame for all the trouble, error and loss of souls that have followed upon the council."⁶

Shortly after this letter to the Christian Nobility Luther was preparing The Babylonian Captivity of the Church. In that treatise he attacked the whole sacramental system of the papacy. Yet Luther devotes no more than one page to what he calls, "the first captivity of the Sacrament." His position had changed only slightly. He no longer identified himself with the Roman Church. He was more ready to defend the Bohemians who desired communion under both kinds.

He said, "If any are to be called heretics and schismatics, it is not the Bohemians or the Greeks, for they take their stand upon the Gospels. It is YOU Romans who are the heretics and godless schismatics, for you presume upon your figments alone against the clear Scripture of God."⁷

Hermann Sasse says, "It was Luther's understanding of the Sacrament as a manifestation of the Gospel and his tender pastoral care for the souls Christ wants to save that causes him to believe that a certain amount of freedom with regard to the *communio sub una* or *sub utraque* is according to the mind of Christ."⁸

Luther's most positive statement regarding communion under one or both kinds is in a letter written to Melanchthon in 1530, says Sasse. Here Luther agrees with Melanchthon's rejection of communion under one species. Luther's final position is clearly stated in the Smalcald Article written in 1537. "And that not only one form is to be given (for) we do not need that high are (spacious wisdom) which is to teach us that under the one form there is as much as under both, yet the one form only is not the entire ordinance and institution (made) ordained and commanded by Christ. And we specifically condemn and in God's name execrate those who not only omit both forms, but also quite autocratically (tyrannically) prohibit, condemn, and blaspheme them as heresy, and so exalt themselves against and above Christ, our Lord and God (opposing and placing themselves ahead of Christ), etc."⁹

B. Transubstantiation and the Real Presence

Though Luther admits that he experienced intellectual struggles

over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, there never was a time when Luther did not believe that the true body and blood of Christ was really present in the sacrament. In the early years after 1517 when his writings were directed against Rome, he raised questions about the medieval scholastic understanding of the Real Presence, but he never questioned the fact of the Real Presence. In his later years when his polemics were directed against Zwingli and the "Schwaenmer" Luther was even more emphatic in stating his belief in the Real Presence.

Sasse says, "Up to 1519 Luther understood the Real Presence in the sense of the official doctrine of transubstantiation."¹⁰ However, a year earlier, in 1518, in a "Sermon on the Worthy Preparation of the Heart for the Reception of the Sacrament of the Eucharist" Reginald Prenter says that Luther speaks of a transformation rather than a transubstantiation. "Similarly Luther's use of the term 'in bread and wine' suggests that the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ does not involve 'transubstantiation,' that is, the annihilation of the natural substance of the bread and wine."¹¹ Prenter admits that at this time Luther was not concerned with polemics against the doctrine of transubstantiation. It may well be that at this time Luther was not openly denying the existing doctrine of the church, but was beginning to have some grave doubts about it, which found expression for the first time in the Treatise on the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, published in 1519. In that treatise Luther says, "There are those who practice their arts and subtleties by trying (to fathom) what becomes of the bread when it is changed into Christ's flesh and of the wine when it

is changed into his blood and how the whole Christ, his flesh and blood, can be encompassed in so small a portion of bread and whe. It does not matter if you do not see it. It is enough to know that it is a divine sign in which Christ's flesh and blood are truly present. The how and the where, we leave to him."¹² This, of course, is not an absolute denial of transubstantiation. But Luther is quite clear in his insistence that it should not be a doctrine of the church. For him the "how" of the Real Presence must be left unanswered.

Milton Valentine, following Luther's thought, says concerning the Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper, "It regards the mode of the presence as an inscrutable mystery, and only insists on recognition of the super natural, divine fact, as a fact for our faith."¹³

Luther's next attack on transubstantiation appears in 1520. In the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, Luther calls transubstantiation the second captivity of the sacrament. At this point he still feels that this captivity of the sacrament is less greivous than communion under one species or the Sacrifice of the Mass. The two latter destroy the sacrament, while transubstantiation does not. That is not to say that communion under one species destroys the validity of the sacrament, but that it destroys the form of the sacrament as it was instituted by Christ. But transubstantiation, which Luther conceeds is of lesser concern, is personally rejected by him. He says that the Aristotelian philosophy upon which St. Thomas builds his theory, is misunderstood by St. Thomas. He says, "...I say that the opinions of the Thomists, whether approved by pope or council, remain only opinious, and would not become articles

of faith even if an angel from heaven were to decree otherwise (Gal. 1:18)."¹⁴

Luther is here attacking the clergy and he does not condemn the common man who holds the doctrine of transubstantiation. He says, "Therefore I permit every man to hold either of the opinions, as he chooses."¹⁵

From this point Luther argues that there is no reason to hold to the doctrine of transubstantiation. He says that the substance of bread and wine does not need to be changed in order for Christ to dwell in them. If it is necessary for the substance to be changed, why is it not necessary for the accidents to be changed also? "If 'transubstantiation' must be assumed in order that Christ's body may not be identified with the bread, why not also a 'trans-accidentation' in order that the body of Christ may not be identified with the accidents?"^{15a} According to Luther, transubstantiation is an unnecessary philosophical theory to explain the unexplainable miracle of the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament.

Luther's final denunciation of transubstantiation comes in the Smalcald Articles. "As regards transubstantiation, we care nothing about the sophisticated subtlety by which they teach that bread and wine leave or lose their natural substance, and that there remain only the appearance and color of bread, and not true bread. For it is in perfect agreement with Holy Scriptures that there is, and remains, bread, as Paul himself calls it, I Cor. 10:16: 'the bread which we break.' And I Cor. 11:28: 'Let him so eat of that bread.'"¹⁶

Luther deals with both the Sacrifice of the Mass and Opus Operatum when he speaks of the third captivity of the Sacrament in The Babylonian Captivity of the Church. He says that the Sacrifice of the Mass is "by far the most wicked abuse of all."¹⁷ It is interesting to note that although Luther believed the Sacrifice of the Mass to be the most wicked of all the abuses of the Sacrament yet he spent considerably more time rejecting the idea of Opus Operatum.

As early as 1518, says Hermann Sasse, Luther rejected the Roman teaching that the Sacrament works ex opere operato: Sasse points to three sermons from 1518 in which Luther attacks Opus Operatum. These sermons are: "Sermon on Penitence," "Resolutiones," and "Asterisci." Luther, quoting an old sentence says, "Not the sacrament, but the faith of the sacrament, justifies." "Faith must precede, not only accompany, the reception of the Sacrament."¹⁸ This denial that the sacrament works ex opere operato does not mean a denial that the sacrament works objectively. "The sacraments do not create faith, they are rather accepted by faith and serve, as acts of God, to assure the faithful of God's grace."¹⁹

Luther maintains that the sacrament works objectively. Both those who have faith and those who lack faith receive the same true body and blood of Christ. The difference is that the person who receives the true body and blood of Christ in faith receives in it the forgiveness of sins; anyone who receives the body and blood of Christ without faith receives it to his own condemnation. This is Luther's doctrine of "manducatio indignorum." He believed that this teaching found its support in the words of Scripture in I Cor. 10:16-21.

In the Treatise on the Blessed Sacrament Luther makes clear the distinction between opus operatum and opus operantis. He doesn't particularly like to use either of these terms for he says, "In short, such expressions as 'opusoperatum' and 'opus operantis' are vain words of men, more of a hinderance than a help."²⁰ Yet as a theologian he knows that he must use these words for they are part of the vocabulary of the theological discipline of his day. "If it is only an opus operatum, it works only harm; it must become an opus operantis," Luther says.²¹

Regin Prenter shows how closely the Cross and the Sacrament of the Altar stand in Luther's theology.²² In the light of this Luther draws an apt analogy. He says that if the sacrament works opus operatum then the death of Christ on the Cross must work the same way. But, it is evident that this is not the way Christ's death works. He says, "Christ on the cross was also a completed work, (opus operatum) which was well pleasing to God. But to this day the Jews have found it a stumbling block because they did not construe it as a work that is made use of in faith (opus operantis)."²³

There is more at stake here than merely theological hair-splitting. If the sacrament worked ex opere operato; then man would have God at his own disposal. Grace would be distributed freely to any and all, and fellowship with God would be automatic simply by receiving the sacrament. God would be subordinate to the sacrament which he instituted.

When Luther turns to the captivity of the church in the Sacrifice of the Mass, he opens a verbal barrage as only Luther can do. However, this thunder of indignation does not come from a mentally deranged

man as some would suggest. The storm comes from a deeply pious person who sees his Lord and his Lord's Church being desecrated. This Luther could not tolerate, though it meant that in his opposition he challenged virtually the whole western world. Death was more probable than life, but that mattered little to Luther. He was convinced that he must attack the abuses that he saw.

In attacking the Sacrifice of the Mass Luther says, "I am attacking a difficult matter, an abuse perhaps impossible to uproot, since through century-long custom and common consent of men it has become so firmly entrenched that it would be necessary to abolish most of the books now in vogue, and to alter almost the entire external form of the churches and introduce, or rather reintroduce, a totally different kind of ceremonies. But my Christ lives, and we must be careful to give more heed to the Word of God than to all the thoughts of men and angels. I will perform my duty and bring to light the facts of the case."²⁴

The first time that Luther discusses in what sense the Mass can be called a sacrifice is in the Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass, written in 1520. This treatise was written between The Address to the German Nobility and The Babylonian Captivity of The Church.

It is evident that Luther's description of the Sacrifice of the Mass in The Babylonian Captivity of the Church as, "by far the most wicked abuse of all" was not a momentary outburst. He says practically the same thing in the Treatise on the New Testament. "Now since almost everyone has made out of the mass a sacrifice which

they offer to God--which, without doubt, is the third and very worst abuse..."²⁵

In what sense can the mass be understood as a sacrifice?

Luther shows that in the Old Testament and in the practice of the earliest Christians, sacrifices were brought. These sacrifices were gifts from the people to God. This custom, says Luther, has been carried on in three ways. 1.) The first and last prayer of the mass are called "Collects." 2.) The second is the "Offeratory." 3.) The third is the elevation of the host by the priest before it is blessed. "This shows that what is being offered to God by us is not the sacrament, but only those "collects" and offerings of food and goods that have been gathered, that God is being thanked for them, and they are being blessed for distribution to all the needy."²⁶ Luther concludes, "Therefore the mass dare not and can not be called a sacrifice because of the sacrament, but only because of the food which is gathered and the prayer in which God is thanked and the food is blessed."²⁷

Luther points out that it is no longer customary to bring food to the mass, therefore the mass can no longer be understood in terms of a sacrifice. In his forth right manner of speaking Luther writes, "Now if you ask what is left in the mass to give it the name of a sacrifice, since so much is said in the office about the sacrifice I answer: Nothing is left."²⁸ As Luther continues he warns that in the sacrament we do not presume to bring God something, because it is God who gives us all things. The only sacrifices we can bring are "spiritual sacrifices." By this he means that an individual should bring himself in penitence

and humility. But even this sacrifice we do not bring to God alone. We are to lay it on Christ and let him present it. Thus Christ is the priest who offers the believers to God as a true sacrifice. The idea that Christ is offered again to God in an "unbloody manner" is completely rejected by Luther.

We turn now to the second period in Luther's controversy concerning the Lord's Supper. In the first period Luther was the aggressor, but as we reach the years following 1524 Luther is put on the defensive by those who hold a symbolical view of the Lord's Supper. Luther in no sense runs back to Rome, but stands fast on the words of Christ, "This is my Body."

II. Against the "Reformed" Doctrine of the Lord's Supper

A. 1524-1526

In discussing this period Hermann Sasse says, "The year 1524 marks an epoch in the history of the sacraments in Western Christendom, for in that year the controversies on Baptism and the Lord's Supper began simultaneously."²⁹ In 1524 Zwingli completed his doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and Karlstadt, who had doubts about the Real Presence wrote five treatises on the subject.

During these years many sermons were preached and many writings published on the subject of the Lord's Supper. Eventually the struggle came to be between Martin Luther and his followers, and Ulrich Zwingli and his party.

During this period Luther tried to avoid a controversy with Zeingli. He never attacked Zwingli personally, nor directly answered any of Zwingli's writings. In the controversy that ultimately followed

Sasse says, "Luther, as all modern scholars agreed, was not the aggressor."³⁰ Zwingli, on the other hand, was so convinced that his interpretation of the Lord's Supper was the only right one that he could not refrain from attacking Luther's position which he felt was a carry over from medieval superstition.

It was not until 1526 that Luther first mentions Zwingli and Oecolampadius together with Karlstadt as the leaders of the "new pernicious sect." Still Luther did not want an open conflict with Zwingli. In his next treatise on The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ -- Against the Fanatics, he did not even mention Zwingli's name. However, the inevitable came. In the following years the controversy picked up momentum until the two men met face to face in the Marburg Colloquy.

B. Preparation for the Marburg Colloquy

The controversy between Zwingli and Luther broke out openly in 1527. Zwingli began the open controversy with his "Amica exegesis, id est exposito eucharistiae negatii ad Martinum Lutherum." From this time through 1528 the leaders of the two parties exchanged treatises on the Lord's Supper. Sasse says, "With his 'Large Confession' of 1528 Luther regarded his discussion with Zwingli as finished."³¹ Zwingli and Oecolampadius answered this confessional writing with "Answer's to Dr. Martin Luther's books called Confessions. Luther believed that he had said all that there was to say on the subject and did not answer this last polemic of Zwingli.

Martin Bucer, in 1526, seems to have first suggested a personal meeting between Zwingli and Luther in a letter to Justus Jonas. In

the following year Philip of Hesse proposed a colloquy to Luther. Luther declined the proposal. But, as is often the case, personal relationships and friendships rather than the issues involved dictated the course of history.

In 1524 Philip accepted the Lutheran Reformation for himself and his territory. In 1526 he expressed himself against the errors of Zwinglianism in regard to the Lord's Supper. Soon after that he began to waver in his Lutheran convictions. This was accomplished through the influence of Strassburg and the Swiss Reformers. Sasse says, "Thus Philip began to appreciate the *via media* of Strassburg and soon he accepted it. From Bucer he learned that the difference between Luther and Zeingli was not inseparable and that it should be possible to find a 'syncretismus' on the basis of a common study of the Bible."³²

In those days of the Reformation the political federations were very important. Under the influence of Zwingli and the Strassburg theologians, Philip saw that nothing short of a political federation of all Protestant territories could save the cause of the Reformation. He believed that the way to reach such a broad base would be through a religious colloquy.

Finally Luther was prevailed upon to such an extent that he accepted the invitation to Marburg. Even as he accepted the invitation he knew that the breach was so fundamental that no significant union could possibly come from the colloquy. So as Sasse says, "Luther went to Marburg, not as a negotiator, but as a confessor."³³

C. The Marburg Colloquy

Preliminary discussions began Friday, October 1, 1529. Luther and Oecolampadius were engaged in one discussion and Zwingli and Melancthon faced each other in another private discussion.

The first session convened on Saturday, October 2, 1529. The colloquy ran through October 4. As the first session began, E. G. Schwiebert says, "Before addressing the audience, Luther had written on the table before him 'Hoc est corpus meum' and covered it with a cloth."³⁴ Luther wanted to have this before him at all times. It was God's word and it would serve to strengthen him in the controversy that was to follow.

It is useless to run through the arguments of the colloquy. They ended virtually where they began. Zwingli still held to the symbolical interpretation of the words of institution. Luther still maintained the Real Presence.³⁵

In order that something should be saved from the colloquy, the Landgrave asked Luther to draft articles on those points where he and Zwingli were in agreement. Luther drafted fifteen articles that were signed by both Zwingli and himself, besides others.³⁶

Schwiebert says concerning the symbolical understanding of the Lord's Supper, "...two factors made it impossible for him (Luther) to accept such a view. The one was exegetical; the other was Christological."³⁷

We turn now to those things which are at the very heart of Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper, the exegetical problem, the Christological problem, and Unio sacramentalis.

1. The Exegetical Problem

There can be little doubt that the basic problem at the Marburg Colloquy was exegetical. Certainly there were philosophical and theological presuppositions which stood behind the exegesis of both Luther and Zwingli. This will become evident when we discuss the Christological problem. But during the actual colloquy the question was how the words, "This is my body" were to be interpreted. Luther took the words in their literal sense. Zwingli said that "est" means "signifies."

There was a basic difference in the hermeneutical principles of Luther and Zwingli. Zwingli approached the Scriptures as the Word of God. But he recognized something higher than the words of the Bible. That is the spiritual interpretation given to the words of the Scripture by the Holy Spirit to those who have faith. In this he reflects some influence from Origen. For Luther, on the other hand, the Word of God was bound up in the letter. The Holy Spirit comes to a person through the external word.

Zwingli admitted that there are passages in the Scriptures where "is" must be interpreted literally. The reason why a figurative interpretation is necessary at this point is that an absurdity would arise if the word was taken literally. The absurdity is that a bodily eating could have a spiritual effect.

In his interpretation of the words of institution Zwingli's chief hermeneutical principle was "alloeosis." In Zwingli's own words the principle of alloeosis is, "a substitution or exchange of the two natures that are in one person, by which one is named and the other is meant, or that is named which they both are and yet only one of them is meant."³⁸

Luther had no time for the principle of alloeosis, He said that, the devil's mask, that old witch, Dame Reason, was the grandmother of alloeosis.³⁹ Or again, "We damn and curse alloeosis all the way to hell, as the devil's own interpretation."⁴⁰ This rejection of alloeosis is not just an expression of a personal feud between Luther and Zwingli. Jaroslav Pelikan shows how deeply Luther felt against this principle. He says, "To Luther alloeosis finally meant a division of the person of Christ himself, and it left no Christ at all, but a mere man. Thus it represented nothing less than a threat to what Luther took to be the heart of the Christian Gospel."⁴¹

At the Marburg Colloquy Luther was not entirely on the defensive. It was not only his idea to reject the exegetical principle of Zwingli. He made some positive exegetical contributions of his own. His fundamental hermeneutical principle was that a text of Scripture must be taken as it stood unless there were compelling reasons for taking it other wise. Luther says, "whoever takes it upon himself to interpret the words of Scripture otherwise than they read has the obligation to prove this from the text of the same passage or from an article of faith."⁴² Luther insisted that a clear passage should explain obscure ones. For him the text in question was so clear that none other could be clearer.

One of Zwingli's main arguments against the possibility of the Real Presence was the fact of the ascension. This is certainly an article of faith which might have challenged Luther. Zwingli said that the body of Christ could not be present because it had ascended to heaven. But Luther saw in this argument an understanding of

"heaven" and "the right hand of God" as specific celestial locations. Luther ridiculed this as childish. He constantly maintained that the words of Scripture were so clear that he could not reject the Real Presence though, as he said, this would be the easier solution.

2. The Christological Problem

There was something more fundamental than exegesis that forced Luther to his position vis-a-vis Zwingli. It was the ancient Christology of the Christian Church. Luther saw in Zwingli's argument -- that the humanity of Christ is in heaven -- the separation that had been made in the two natures of Christ.

It is interesting to note as Hermann Sasse points out that Zwingli Christology was closely akin to that of medieval scholasticism..they taught that the body of Christ was in a certain place in heaven. This became one of the arguments for transubstantiation. Since the body of Christ is in heaven, they said, it can only be present in the Lord's Supper by a conversion of the substance into the body of Christ.

Luther saw in Christ the God-man whose two natures could not be separated. It is through the "Communicatio idiomatum" that Luther understood the Real Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Especially is his understanding based on the "genus majestaticum." By this the human nature of Christ shares the properties of the divine nature. Thus the omnipresence of the divinity of Christ is also shared by his humanity. The whole Christ, not just one of his natures, is present in the Lord's Supper.

It was more than a metaphysical question for which Luther was arguing. For him the unity of the two natures of Christ preserves

the doctrine of the Incarnation. If the two natures of Christ are separated then the Incarnation was not real. If there is no real Incarnation then there is no salutary effect in the death of Christ.

For Luther the Lord's Supper was a miracle. "For it is an unspeakable miracle that the inseparable union of the two natures causes the body of Christ which is in heaven, to be present on the altar."⁴³

3. Unio Sacramentalis

How is it possible that the body of Christ can be present in the bread and at the same time be distinct from the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation? Luther claims that there is a sacramental union between Christ's body and the bread. In this sacramental union the body and the bread exist together. So, whatever happens to the bread also happens to the body of Christ. This union is analogous to the union of the two natures in the one person of Christ. The human nature is not converted into the divine nature nor are the two natures mixed so as to create a single nature which is distinct from the original two natures. Rather, the two natures retain their own identity but exist together in an inseparable union.

Hermann Sasse says that this union in the Lord's Supper is not to be understood as consubstantiation because no theory is built up about the coexistence of the two substances. But, it seems to me that if the concept of substance is granted then consubstantiation is the logical conclusion of Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper, even though Luther probably never used the word. The concept may be present though the word is lacking. It is the concept that makes

the teaching, not the word. But, on the other hand, if the philosophical idea of substance in rejected Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper still stands, for it is not based on the concept of substance nor on any other philosophical explanation. Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is based on the conviction that the whole body of Christ is contained in the bread in a supernatural way which is beyond human comprehension and philosophical speculation.

III. Conclusion

The difficulty in comprehending the mystery of the Real Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper prompts one to join in a prayer with Luter. "Therefore you can joyfully say to Christ, both in your death and in the last Judgement: My dear Lord Jesus, there has arisen a strife about thy words at the Last Supper. Some want them to be understood differently from what they say. However, since they can not teach me anything certain, but only lead me into confusion and undertainty...I have remained with thy text as the words stand. If there should be an obscurity in them, thou wilt bear with me if I do not completely understand them, just as Thou didst forbear with Thine apostles when they did not understand Thee in many things-- for instance, when thou didst speak to them about thy suffering and resurrection, and yet they retained thy words and did not alter them. As also Thy dear mother did not understand when thou didst tell her, Luke 2, 'I must be about my Father's business,' and yet she kept these words in her heart and did not alter them: Thus, I also have remained with these thy words: This is my body, eat. Lo, no enthusiast will dare to speak thus with Christ."⁴⁴

1. Richard H. Fischer, Word and Sacrament III, Vol. XXXVII of Luther's Works, p. 18.
2. Ibid., Footnote p. 18.
3. Martin Luther, The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods, pp. 49-50.
4. Ibid. p. 50
5. Martin Luther, Vorelerung Doctoris Martini Luther etlicher Artikell yn seynem Sermon von dem heylige sacrament, in Luthers ere, p. 80.
6. Martin Luther, An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility p. 141.
7. Martin Luther, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, p. 24
8. Hermann Sasse, This is my Body, p. 95
9. Martin Luther, The smalcald Articles, Concordia Triglotta p. 493.
10. Sasse, p. 100
11. Reginald Prenter, "Luther on Word and Sacrament", More About Luther p. 109.
12. Martin Luther, The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods, p. 60.
13. Milton Valentine, Christian Theology, p. 344
14. Luther, Babylonian Captivity, p. 29.
15. Ibid. p. 30
- 15a. Ibid. p. 33
16. Luther, the Smalcald Articles. P. 493.
17. Luther, Babylonian Captivity, p. 35.
18. Sasse, p. 83.
19. Ibid. p. 84.
20. Luther, The Blessed Sacrament ... and the Brotherhoods, p. 64.
21. Ibid.
22. Prenter, Luther on Word and Sacrament. p. 121.
23. Luther, The Blessed Sacrament... and the Brotherhoods, p. 63.
24. Luther, the Babylonian Captivity, p. 36.

25. Luther, a Treatise on the New Testament, that is, the Holy Mass.
p. 94.
26. Ibid. p. 95
27. Ibid. p. 96
28. Ibid. p. 97.
29. Sasse, p. 137
30. Ibid. 130
31. Ibid. 187
32. Ibid. 200
33. Ibid. 214-5
34. E. G. Schwiebert, Luther and His Times. p. 706
35. For text of proceedings see: Sasse, p. 269-272.
37. Schwiebert, p. 698.
38. Sasse, p. 146.
39. Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther the Expositor; Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings, Companion Volume to Luther's Work's. p. 129.
40. Ibid
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid. p. 126.
43. Sasse, p. 154.
44. Ibid. pp. 109-110.

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